

MARY JO FURGAL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Okay. Today is the 20th of August, 2008 and this is an interview with Mary Jo Furgal?

FURGAL: Furgal.

Q: And it's Mary, M-A-R-Y, and then another word J-O, and then F-U-R-G-A-L. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

And you go by Mary Jo?

FURGAL: Right. That's my first name.

Q: Alright. Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

FURGAL: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, and moved when we were six to a blue collar western suburb.

Q: Okay. When were you born?

FURGAL: July 6, 1939.

Q: Okay. What was your family, your name?

FURGAL: Rossi, R-O-S-S-I.

Q: What can you tell about- let's take your father's side of the family. What do you know about where do they come from and all that?

FURGAL: Well, not as much as I would like to because my dad was orphaned when he was 14. His elder sister raised him; she was 17 and the baby was two, seven kids in all. My paternal grandparents were born in north Italy; I have a cousin who's currently trying to narrow that down to exactly where.

Q: Was your dad born in Italy?

FURGAL: No. My paternal aunts and uncle were all born in the U.S.

Q: How about, do you know, going back a ways, where in Italy or what they were up to?

FURGAL: Well, they emigrated from Turin; that's about the closest we can get because once the parents died, nobody kept contact with the relatives back in Italy. We think my grandmother was illiterate but we're not sure about my grandfather; he was a coal miner, and I think he probably died not of black lung disease but because of alcoholism. Nobody's real sure about any of this.

Q: Well, it was a very rough life.

FURGAL: It was very rough. Their home town of Toluca, a coal mining town of Illinois, still exists although coal is no longer mined in Illinois..

Q: So, how about your- that's your grandfather?

FURGAL: That's my dad's parents.

Q: Your grandmother, was she around when you were around?

FURGAL: No, they both died by the time my dad was 14.

Q: Oh boy, okay.



FURGAL: And they never spoke Italian after that. My dad wouldn't admit to knowing it, although I'm sure he spoke it before he went to school.

Q: Tell me about your dad a bit. What do you know about him and what he was doing and education, that sort of thing?

FURGAL: Well, the story goes he finished high school after I was born. He was an accountant but did not go to college. He was not a CPA (certified public accountant) because he didn't have the formal background. He worked for the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) during the Second World War. Of course, when the soldiers came home, in those days, other employees were let go to make room for the veterans. He then went to work for Greyhound Bus Company from where he subsequently retired, probably when he was 65. And he died when he was nearly 79 in the mid '80s.

Q: And how about on your mother's side? What do you know about them?

FURGAL: Again, very little. I only knew my grandmother, the one who died when I was five; I have two memories of her and that's it. My maternal grandfather died before my mother was married. As the story goes, although we haven't been able to prove it, he was raised in a military orphanage in White Russia. A woman, dressed in black, who would come to the orphanage and weep over him. We think he escaped, from being drafted in the 1870s. My mother told the story that one day, somebody came to the door looking for him and he slammed the door in their face and wouldn't talk to them; this happened after his name was in the personals column of a local paper. So there was something mysterious about his background but nobody ever found out.

Q: But out of Russia?

FURGAL: So the story goes.

Q: Because Russia in those days included Poland and-

FURGAL: I think he may actually have been Polish. My grandmother, his second wife, was Polish but they were married in the U.S. As far as we know, there was no family connection back there between their families.

Q: So, how about your mother?



FURGAL: She was a secretary/stenographer. She was very proud of having worked through the Depression. And when they married in '35, she couldn't wear her wedding ring to work because jobs were for men. Women couldn't work in those days.

Q: They had to parcel them out and the theory was that if a woman- her husband had to support her and so if you only had a limited number of jobs the man was considered the principle bread earner. Unless, of course, the women were widowed or unmarried.

FURGAL: So she always was very proud of the fact. And she was a very good- I don't know what you called them in those days; they certainly weren't administrative aides. She was either a secretary or stenographer. She worked for a food supply company which later did a cook book, praising her contributions..

Q: Do you know how your mother and father met?

FURGAL: My dad played, what we were told was semi-pro ball in some field in Chicago and they met that way. And evidently, you know how those things used to be among immigrants, the Poles came first and the Italians came second and so my only maternal uncle was very upset because my mother was going to marry an Italian.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, Chicago, of course, is the-

FURGAL: Chicago is famous for its ethnic neighborhoods.

Q: -the excellent example of divisions. On my mother's side, her family were all German and they spoke German at home and you know, it was a German family.

FURGAL: Because my parents were not the same nationality, we were not raised ethnically. When we moved to Maywood, a blue collar suburb of Chicago, everybody was just all mixed ethnically. There was one woman in my grade school that had eight different ethnic backgrounds and she was very proud of it. I wasn't raised that way at all. We were raised Catholic; I had 16 years of Catholic education. I went to a high school, a Catholic girls' high school in the middle of the Jewish area on the west side of Chicago. Everybody was either Irish or Italian. If you weren't, you might have been a little bit of this, a little bit of that.

It was comical on St. Patrick's Day because the Irish girls would dye their hair green; for St. Joseph's Day, two days before, the Italian girls would dye their hair red. Ethnic identification in Chicago in those days was very important..



Q: I think it hasn't completely- I remember talking to the Polish consul one time and saying he had the Polish was in the second largest Polish city in the world; Warsaw being the first and Chicago being the second.

FURGAL: Yes, it was then; I don't know about now.

Q: Well, on the family, were you raised Catholic? And how Catholic was your family, would you say?

FURGAL: Oh, my father, unlike his sisters always went to church; every Sunday even after my mother died. Now, my aunts only started doing it when they got older. I don't know how Catholic they were raised but certainly when he married my mother and afterwards, he was devout.

Q: It's interesting that your father went because so often it's the mother who goes and the father who smokes a cigarette outside the church and waits for his wife to come back.

FURGAL: My uncle, who was widowed, also went to church. And, unlike most families, the women died first. My dad and my uncle were widowers which again was a very unusual thing for those days, I think.

Q: Where did you live, as a kid, where did you live at the time?

FURGAL: In Maywood.

Q: How do you spell that?

FURGAL: M-A-Y-W-O-O-D. Maywood Racetrack and American Can Company used to be the only two money-makers in town.

Q: You mentioned it was sort of blue collar but as a kid, this would be in the '40s, what was it like?

FURGAL: Well, we always had enough to wear and enough to eat. It was a very secure childhood. I mean, we never went on vacations or summer camp meant Girl Scout camp, that kind of a thing, but everybody was pretty much the same. There was a black side of town and there was the white side of town and never the twain shall meet. I don't think I went to school with an, African American until I was in college in Iowa. We did have two African students there also.

Q: To talk a bit about family life, did you have brothers, sisters?

FURGAL: I had two brothers, one of whom died two years ago, and a sister. The remaining brother lives in upstate New York now and my sister lives in a suburb of Chicago.

Q: What was sort of family life like at home? Did you all sit around the table at night and talk about things or each go your own way or how would you describe it?

FURGAL: Well, I was the eldest of four and my sister was born in 1940 and my two brothers in '47 and '48. So we were considerably older than they were and we both left when we finished high school. I went to college and my sister was a nun for a period of time. She left the house at 18 and didn't come back as much as I did; subsequently I went to graduate school a couple of times so I was in and out of the house. My mother never worked outside the house after we were born. We lived close enough to the grade school to walk home for lunch. And my dad would come home after work and we always had dinner together. There was no TV when I was very young so I wasn't raised on it. My brothers watched a little more of it.

Q: Where did the family fall politically?

FURGAL: Well, you know, I think my father was probably a moderate Republican. He was an Eisenhower Republican; he wasn't a Barry Goldwater Republican but I don't recall politics ever being discussed at home. We used to joke he'd probably tell my mother for whom to vote. I can't say that for sure because we never talked about politics, as opposed to my father-in-law who was a precinct captain for the first Mayor Daley. Subsequently I switched allegiance after I was married.

Q: Well, how was, let's take elementary school first. You go to elementary school there? I mean, you say it was close to your house?

FURGAL: Yes, I went all eight years to the same elementary school. It was a Catholic school attached to the Church.



Q: What was it called?

FURGAL: Saint Eulalia.

Q: Saint what?

FURGAL: Eulalia. She was Spanish, we think.

Q: You better spell that.

FURGAL: E-U-L-A-L-I-A. I think she's been one of the people who's been de-sainted, or defrocked or whatever. You know, they did demote a couple some years ago.

Q: Yes. They defrocked, or whatever one does, de-haloed a whole bunch of saints.

FURGAL: Yes. The school doesn't exist anymore. The neighborhood was badly red-lined in the '60s. Are you familiar with that real estate term?

Q: Well, it's a term of integration, wasn't it?

FURGAL: No, more like disintegration. Disintegration.

FURGAL: Red-lining means that the real estate agents wouldn't show the houses in a certain area to anybody but African Americans. When my dad left Maywood maybe in the late '70s; he was one of the last white families on the block. He hung on a couple of years after my mother died and it was just too much for him to maintain the house. It looks every bit as good now as it did then. The people who moved in there have maintained it as well as it was previously. we drive by once in a while to look at the house. It was real estate agents but they faced lawsuits in the area. Some of the surrounding suburbs took the real estate agents to court, especially a town called Oak Park where Frank Lloyd Wright and Ernest Hemingway are noted for being from.

Q: Well, how did you find elementary school?

FURGAL: Oh, fine. I did well. I was a goody two shoes, being the eldest.

Q: You probably did well in your spelling bees and stuff like that.

FURGAL: Funny you mention that. I think the only time I was ever on television was when they had the National Spelling Bee finals in Chicago; I was the eighth to the last student to drop out, something like that. I did very well in spelling.

Q: I used to hate girls like you. I was always a terrible speller.

FURGAL: My brothers probably should not have gone to that school. The classes were too big. They both, I think, had reading disabilities that were never caught. But my sister and I just breezed through.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

FURGAL: Oh, very much.

Q: Can you think of any of the books, sort of elementary level, that really grabbed you and, you know, type of books or something that you really found a little fun to read?

FURGAL: Nancy Drew and Walter Farley's "Black Stallion" series.

Q: Well, Nancy Drew seems to be sort of the most common factor of-

FURGAL: Women my age.

Q: Women your age who came into the Foreign Service, any way.

FURGAL: But I never read mysteries for years after that and now I've started reading mysteries again. But there is one other book, and I'd love to find it, that was called Janice Meredith; a "romancey" story, I guess they would call it a young adult novel now. But I read it in grade school and it was a young woman who was in love with a Revolutionary soldier. The first time I read that, I cried; I just thought it was so romantic. The second time I read it, I laughed myself silly.



Q: I grew up on Kenneth Roberts and his books about the Revolution and all. These are guys' books.

FURGAL: I read a lot. We used to bike over to the library, which was on the other side of town.

Q: Was it a good library, did you find?

FURGAL: It was a Carnegie library. For a town like Maywood, it was good enough.

Q: I must say Carnegie made a lasting contribution to our- the American and I guess British world too.

FURGAL: Right, right. At least he did some good with his money.

Q: How did you find the nuns? You know, nuns have a reputation for being very strict and all that. Did you find or were you so good they didn't bother you?

FURGAL: Well, they didn't really bother me. There were nuns that we liked and nuns that were stricter. My teachers were all American; I had no foreign born nuns like my husband did. He went to Catholic school in the city which was a lot different than those in the suburbs. I'm still in touch with my second grade teacher. In fact, I saw her last month at the motherhouse in Dubuque, Iowa. She's in her early 90s; she was a cousin of my mentor in college and that's how we made connections again.

Q: At this time and somewhat later, did you feel under- were the priests sort of giving thou shalt not see such and such a movie or read such and such a book? I mean, was the hand of the priest felt very much?

FURGAL: Well, there was, in the local Catholic newspaper in Chicago, I think, something like Legion of Decency where movies were rated.

Q: Yes, there was the Legion of Decency.

FURGAL: I don't know if that was the one that did the movies.

Q: Well, the Legion of Decency did list things that you should- I'm not sure- and I think it also listed books but I'm not sure but I know it did movies.

FURGAL: It could be but- I suspect if I hadn't left Chicago I'd remember a lot more from my early adulthood..

Q: Well, did you feel the- you were a kid, by the time you were five, six or so, when the boys came home from World War II, did World War II and the results of World War II have any effects that you can recall as a kid?

FURGAL: No. Not at all. We moved to Maywood just before my sixth birthday, I think that was in '45. My dad was drafted and was called to Milwaukee and my mother, probably was semi-hysterical; she had two toddlers because my sister and I are only 14 months apart. But it was toward the end of the war and when they learned that my dad was in his 30s, they sent him home because he had two dependents; they didn't need him that badly. My mother was very relieved, I can imagine, but I have no recollection of that, nor of the end of the war. The only thing I have a recollection of militarily is the end of the Korean War when MacArthur came to Chicago for a big parade. My father was going to take us and then couldn't for some reason and we were very disappointed but that's all I remember about either of those two wars. It was a very placid childhood. We all sat on the front stoop after dinner, playing until it got dark.

Q: Well, you didn't have air conditioning and-

FURGAL: A good reason to stay outside.

Q: I remember this in Annapolis. You really got to know people on the block because there you were during the hot evenings and sit around with the fan and talk to each other.

FURGAL: That's for sure. It was very peaceful, serene. My parents never hit us; they weren't harsh disciplinarians. I don't think you need to hit kids and bang them around to have them turn out alright. None of us were ever in jail or picked up for anything. Even my brothers were never arrested, not even for DWIs (driving while intoxicated).

Q: Well, was there a middle school and then high school?

FURGAL: No, it was straight through, first to eighth.



Q: Well, where'd you go to high school?

FURGAL: A Catholic girls' high school on the west side of Chicago that doesn't exist anymore.

Q: How did you find high school?

FURGAL: Fine. I never had any problem academically that I remember.

Q: Was it run by nuns or by priests?

FURGAL: Nuns. Different order of nuns.

Q: What order?

FURGAL: Mercy nuns.

Q: How did this high school, I mean what were you doing there? Curricular and extracurricular things were you doing?

FURGAL: Well, they had two streams; one was, I guess, more academic than the other and I wanted to be in the history stream but I was put in the science stream because of grade school marks. I was on the newspaper and the yearbook but did not participate in sports. The school did have some sports but I wasn't interested.

Q: How about dating?

FURGAL: Well, my sister did; she was the one that became the nun. I never did in high school. My friends had to force me to go to the senior prom; they fixed me up. And then I went to an all girl college. But I've been happily married for 37 years so, it wasn't such a bad experience.

Q: It can be quite a traumatic experience, that high school.

FURGAL: Not at all.

Q: Did sort of the outside world intrude- you were in high school from when to when?

FURGAL: '53 to '57.

Q: Did you get any feel for greater Chicago and sort of the racial tensions and all? Did that intrude?

FURGAL: Only in the sense of the red-lining. The high school was in the Austin area, which is on the west side of the city. Do you know Chicago at all?

Q: Actually I was born there but as a kid, during the Depression we moved to California in '33 or something.

FURGAL: Okay. Well, Austin straight west down the Eisenhower Expressway, next to the suburb of Oak Park. And Austin was very leafy, with many two and three flat buildings, some single family homes, some big apartment buildings. It was the first area that was badly red-lined because after the Second World War, the black migration started coming west from the South Side and moved in. Well, nobody can move in unless somebody moves out. People panicked and started to move. The story goes that people were moving out in the middle of the night since they didn't want to tell their neighbors. Subsequently the high school couldn't afford to stay open because the people moving in weren't Catholic; they tended to be Baptist. The nuns sold the building to Austin high school and Austin subsequently sold it to somebody else.

Q: Well, what was, as you understood it, what was the rationale for the red-lining of- making certain areas by the real estate agents strictly for African Americans and blacks?

FURGAL: As for their rationale, I don't know. I think real estate agents tended to make more money doing that.

Q: Well, they probably charged more.

FURGAL: They charged more because people were so desperate to have decent housing; this was during the civil rights movement and the white majority were - not very enlightened. Even, among some of my own relatives, there tended to be mild anti- Semitism and more vocal anti-minority feelings than would be expressed now.



Q: Well of course, anti-Semitism is, you centuries old, but in a way liberal people, liberal whites were usually not affected by red-lining or something like that. It's usually the working class that gets-

FURGAL: The working class is what I am describing..

Q: And Chicago has been a- and Boston are the two places where it has become very apparent, that the liberals sit off somewhere and say oh, you should to this and you should be very nice but they don't have to bear the brunt of the problem, which is a problem.

FURGAL: The red-lining I am aware of began in the '60s and through the '70s. The suburb of Oak Park beat it; they experimented with methods so that real estate agents could only show so many homes in one area of Oak Park and what number of homes meant a tipping point. The African-Americans who moved into Oak Park were those who had jobs and could maintain their houses. It was more of a socioeconomic issue than a color issue. But the red-lining in that area was pretty bad for a while.. : Well, you graduated in high school in '57?

FURGAL: '57.

Q: Fifty-seven. Where'd you go?

FURGAL: I went to a small liberal arts college in Iowa. In those days there wasn't the, I hate to say it, this hysteria about college visits that starts when students are freshmen. I applied to two colleges and I went to the one that gave me the most money. But you see, I was the first girl on either side to go to college, because we were very definitely working class, on both my mother's side and my dad's side. If my grandparents had been alive, they wouldn't have believed how their grandchildren developed in the U.S. Subsequently my sister went, my brothers went, some of my cousins went to college. My mother was the youngest of her family and I was the first one on both sides that went to college.

Q: Well, did you feel any pressure that being a girl that maybe you should not go to college but maybe earn money in order to send your brothers to college? Of course, by that time I suppose you-



FURGAL: Oh, no. I went to school in the city and the kids that I knew at my high school were all second generation, had parents that had come over. I was third generation; my dad was born in the States and he wasn't raised ethnically; once his parents died they were too busy making enough money to just feed all seven of them. But I had classmates in high school who were like that. In fact, when we had our 50th anniversary of high school graduation, last year, I saw one woman who was smart, but she was an Italian and she had brothers so that's where the money went. But that attitude was very prominent in my high school.

Q: Well, where did you go to college then?

FURGAL: A small women's school called Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa.

Q: And was this a Catholic school? And you were there '57 to '61?

FURGAL: Yes, I graduated in '61.

Q: What was it like there? I mean, I would think Dubuque was, it sounds like the back of beyond or something.

FURGAL: It was but we didn't think so then. Iowa was dry at that time. You had to live in Iowa and belong to a key club to be able to drink alcohol. Now, my dad, to him the height of drinking was Mogan David at Christmas. After we were married we started teaching him to drink wine. So not being able to drink in college did not bother me.

Q: Mogan David being a wine designed- Jewish sacramental wine, sweet as heck.

FURGAL: You've heard of it? Mogan David. Now I think it is not terribly drinkable.

Q: But as a kid I used to have- it was Southern Comfort.

FURGAL: We were not accustomed to alcohol as children.. My dad wasn't a professional but we always had enough to eat. And Catholic school tuition in those days was a dollar a month.. I never dated but I got a very good education, certainly better than somebody who goes to a big state school where they have a MA or a PhD candidate teaching world history. I had a PhD teaching me world civilization in a class of 30 people.



Q: Well, what was- it was a college, was it?

FURGAL: It was a college at that time a BA and BS-granting institution.

Q: Was it- how Catholic was it, in a way?

FURGAL: Well, it was much more Catholic then than it is now. Not everybody was but the few who weren't, had good reasons being there. There was nothing much to do in Dubuque; Iowa was dry, Illinois was wet. If you were caught in East Dubuque, Illinois drinking, you were in big trouble. God forbid you got pregnant. You were out the door in a minute. I must admit I don't know if that ever happened; just the threat was enough to stop people.

We had a very good cultural program; I remember Marian Anderson singing on campus. And there was an active sports program. My roommate married a boy from the Catholic boys' college over the hill. Girls dated and met their husbands at these other colleges in town; I just wasn't the social type.

Q: As you were doing this did you- how did you feel about being a young woman getting a good education; what did you see yourself doing?

FURGAL: Well, in my day, probably yours too, what else did women do but go into teaching or nursing?

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: As for nursing, I didn't like science and teaching I wasn't crazy about but what else did women do? So I started out as an English major with a teaching minor, ended up with a history major, no teaching whatsoever. I knew teaching wasn't for me; I just didn't know what I was going to do.

Q: Well now, so '56 to '61, the height of the Cold War, what did you- did the outside world intrude much? You know, I'm talking about the international world; Cold War and other things.

FURGAL: Not that I remember but in those days you didn't have a TV in your room. There was a smoker in those days and some girls would go play bridge and smoke but I would go to the library and try to drag my friends with me. So I graduated magna cum laude, I think, because of that but I wasn't a brilliant student; I was a hard worker. It was more that than anything.



Q: Well, what about history? Were you concentrating there on anything?

FURGAL: In those days, Clarke was a small school; probably no more than 1,200 students. It was a small college; completely accredited, the PhD teachers. Most of them were nuns but they were educated; they weren't immigrants who barely spoke English like some of the teachers my husband had in grade school. I had an excellent woman senior year who was the cousin of the second-grade teacher I mentioned earlier. She'd gotten her MA at the University of Hawaii and I think her PhD from the University of San Francisco. I'm not positive. She was such a good teacher. I only had her for our senior year. But I think the thing that made the difference, that really lit the fire, if you will, and the reason I use that title on my card, is that as a junior I spent one semester in Europe.

The story goes and I'm sorry I keep saying that because as a young adult, you don't take the time to ask these questions when you can. I think my parents got a second mortgage so I could go to Europe. I had a tuition scholarship at Clarke so they had saved a little bit of money on me. There's an organization in Chicago called Institute of European Studies (IES), started in 1950; it was the first organization that really pushed study abroad. Some of the bigger universities have their own places overseas but IES was set up for the colleges and universities that didn't have the wherewithal to set up their own institutions abroad. You went through them and all your credits transferred to your home institution. I went during the first semester of my junior year; I'm sure my aunts thought my father was mad, sending his daughter off back to the old country. When I came back to campus, a nun I had had for English Lit said, you know, that trip really changed you. I don't know what I had done but she could tell that it had really excited me.

Q: Where and doing what?

FURGAL: Vienna. The classes were in English. If you had enough German you could go to University of Vienna but I didn't have enough German to do that.

Q: How did you find Vienna at the time?



FURGAL: Oh, we enjoyed it. I went to my first operetta and I saw Giacometti, the famous Italian sculptor, for the first time. We traveled to Rome at Easter and Greece after the term was over. I think that whole experience really affected me. When I came back, this nun I mentioned earlier had started to teach Asian history and Russian history. I took those courses and had could relate to different cultures. The study abroad experience had given me a different frame of reference that got me out of that comfortable background I came from. That is why I am such a strong believer in study abroad and various exchange programs. If I had the authority, I would mandate that every student participate in such a program at one point during their academic years.

Q: Well had you, going back to high school and elementary school even, Chicago of course has a wealth museumthe Chicago Institute of Art and you know, other things; did you get into Chicago much?

FURGAL: Very little. My father didn't have a car until I think I was in eighth grade. The first TV on the block arrived when I was in fourth grade; we didn't get ours until a couple of years later. When it broke, it wasn't fixed for two years, Chicago had good public transportation but there wasn't a lot of money for family dinners and stuff like that. I didn't really know too much about Chicago. I'd probably been to the Art Institute and I remember going to a play; we had to do that for senior year, English, in high school.

Q: This is one reason for this oral history; we're trying to recreate the times, which were really quite different. And it could be, I won't say isolated, constrained within certain neighborhoods and all this and people couldn't reach out as much.

FURGAL: My sister, who dated, got around a little bit more; she used to go downtown on the train to some of the jazz clubs. Nowadays parents in some of these further out suburbs won't let their kids go downtown in Chicago by themselves. I started working in downtown Chicago in an office when I was 15, during the summers and I would take the train down every day and come back and thought nothing of it.

Q: What were you doing?

FURGAL: Oh, my father got me a job at Greyhound Bus Company, counting tickets or something like that.



Q: Before we move on to leaving school, you were at Clarke College during the election of 1960, which was Kennedy/Nixon, which engaged an awful lot of younger people, particularly a Catholic candidate for the first time and also both were quite young and it was an exciting time. Did that get to you at all/

FURGAL: It did. One person in particular became very active and was very pro-Kennedy. Since I had not been raised particularly political, I was turned off by the movie star quality of the election campaign and the way the girls were carrying on in smokers. Not to inject too much politics into this but it was the only time I ever voted for a Republican. I voted for Nixon because I was so turned off by this hype.

Q: Well no, it's hard. Kennedy has been given almost sainthood or something like that. I voted for him but I must say I was not overly engaged by the man and in retrospect he did that much but-

FURGAL: If he had lived I don't think he would have gone down with the same reputation that he has today. But I remember being very affected by his assassination in '63; that was a whole other matter. But 1960 was my first election. Also, since then I've been more engaged than I was in that one.

Q: So here you are a history major, you've had a taste of Europe and we're coming up to '61 and you don't want to teach history so what are you going to do?

FURGAL: Well, I called one of my professors and she put me in touch with a friend of hers who worked at WGN, one of the major radio stations, then owned, I don't know now, by the Tribune Company.

Q: This was Colonel McCormick's paper?

FURGAL: Yes. WGN, world's greatest newspaper. And I worked there for a year, at the TV station.

Q: What were you doing?

FURGAL: I was timing "Divorce Court" for commercial insertions, an experience which caused me to quit after a year. I am still surprised to remember that I quit because I didn't believe in what I was doing. I had such a good Catholic guilt complex or social conscience I guess, after all that Catholic education.



Q: Because it was divorce?

FURGAL: No, not particularly because it was divorce. My boss was a wonderful lady who was about 40ish about that time. She told me that one of her greatest accomplishments was keeping "Divorce Court" off the air on Thanksgiving. And I thought oh my God, do I want to spend the rest of my life doing this? It was my first job and I had to carpool. I remember stopping when, was it Neil Armstrong going to the moon in '61? We stopped under the viaduct to hear that radio broadcast.

Q: Yes, I mean, we were sending rockets; we weren't the men who went to the moon. They went in '69 or '70.

FURGAL: Okay. There was something significant that happened at that carpool time..

Q: Kennedy was making a big thing about going to the moon in 10 years.

FURGAL: Yes, yes; it was something to do with that.

I only stayed there a year. I didn't have the background for it as I was a history major. Communications was not a popular major in those days. Then I went to work for a weekly newspaper for two years.

Q: Well, tell me about "Divorce Court." What was this? What sort of program was this?

FURGAL: Oh, I guess it's like the Judge Judy program but with all divorce case half-hour shows and you had to time it down. I'd sit there, click, click, the commercials would be inserted and you'd start timing it again. It was a dead-end job as far as I was concerned. Then I went to work for a weekly Catholic newspaper for two years. That I liked very much.

Q: Was John Paul XXIII then?

FURGAL: Yes. That was an exciting time.

Q: I would think that this, for a Catholic, I'm not Catholic but I would think for a Catholic this would be pretty exciting times. I mean, things were really changing, weren't they?

FURGAL: They were. I am surprised that with a name like Kennedy, you're not Catholic.

Q: Well, it's Charles Stuart Kennedy; it's Scottish.

FURGAL: I see. I did a little reporting and editing. I loved going out to the printing plant; it was all linotype when I first started. I also did the clippings for the newspaper morgue. I liked that for two years but without a journalism background, I knew that I didn't have much of a future there. Of course, in those days a lot of people didn't have it; it was only after Watergate that journalism schools became popular. I was moaning to my mentor who said, well, go to graduate school then. Most of my close friends had gotten married the summer after graduation; I was the only one not married and having children.

Q: Was your family and relatives saying, looking at you and saying well this is all very nice but when are you getting married?

FURGAL: I suspect some of my aunts did but my parents never bugged me about this, never told me what to do and where to go. My mentor said there's a new institution in Honolulu, called the East West Center (EWC). It started in 1960 when Lyndon Johnson turned the first spade of dirt. She suggested I apply for a MA in Asian Studies. After two years in a job with no real future and all married friends, what are you going to do? So I applied but I didn't get the grant. Then I applied to become a graduate assistant in the history department and I got that. I later received a grant when I was already on campus. I quit my graduate assistantship and eventually achieved a MA in East Asian history, with a concentration on Japan.

Q: So this would be '61 to-

FURGAL: '64.

Q: '64, really.

FURGAL: '62 to '64 I worked for the newspaper and then '64 I went to Hawaii.

Q: So you were there '64 to '66.

FURGAL: '68. '64 to '68. I spent a year in Japan as part of field study and I came home in '68.



Q: Alright. Let's talk about the East West Center; it was fairly new then, wasn't it?

FURGAL: It started in 1960 and in those days it was a wonderful place to be because everybody was on full grant; the emphasis was on students, one third Americans and two thirds Asians. The official title was the Center for Cultural and Technical Interchange between East and West and it really was; it was an exciting place in those days because it was fresh and experimental. I went out in '64, so I was part of the early days. I lived in the EWC dorm and then I won a grant in '65. So I was able to resign my assistantship, a position which I did not enjoy at all..

Q: What does GA, which is a-

FURGAL: Graduate assistant.

Q: What did that mean?

FURGAL: I graded papers. There were three classes of introductory world civilization for undergraduates taught by an Australian, Charles Gavin Dawes. Why I remember his name I haven't a clue; he would teach world civilization classes to three classes of 300, 400 and 700. students, in a nearby movie theater since the classes were so big. I wondered what kind of an education these poor kids were getting. I had to read their awful handwriting and try to grade essay exams; it was terrible.

Q: I would think it would be awful if particularly two thirds of the students were non-English.

FURGAL: No, that was at the University of Hawaii. East West Center was entirely different. We were attached to the University of Hawaii but were mainly graduate students.

Q: Did you get any feel for the University of Hawaii? Was it very good or not?

FURGAL: We lived a separate life in our own dormitories at the East West Center because we were on full grant in our own buildings. We used the university's facilities and of course the grant paid for the state to educate us. My degree in Japanese Studies, well history really, was from the University of Hawaii. I think it's better now but it was fairly provincial in those days. I think it's very good in tropical medicine, teaching of English as a second language, and subjects that draw on the strengths of the islands like geology. But I don't know that you'd go there to get a BS in English literature. Any of the Asian studies, however you want to define that, Chinese history, Chinese literature, whatever; I believe are very good. The Americans all came for MAs or PhDs whereas the Asian students, if they came from the islands where there were no BA degree-granting institutions, would study for BAs. I'd say most of the Asians came for advanced degrees. Some came for technical studies; some came to learn special skills. We had two Samoan women in the dorm who were both married, had to leave their families at home; they came for six months and were training, one to become a dietitian for the school system there and the other to become a dietitian to beef up the tourism industry. It was a wonderful and it still exists; it's celebrating its fiftieth anniversary next year. You can Google it or check their website for more details; it's a wonderful place to go if you're interested in Asian studies at all. Q: Did you- were you studying an oriental language?

FURGAL: I had Japanese for two years.

Q: How'd you find Japanese?

FURGAL: In those days it wasn't so bad because I was in my 20s. You know, my mind still could wrap itself around the language. We had an intensive language program to start then I did the normal year's study course; after which we went to Japan for a six month field study. I lived with a family and went to a language school in Kyoto. I saved enough money to go off grant and stayed on in Japan for another six months. So I was really away from Chicago for four years.

Q: Well, how did you find Japan?



FURGAL: Oh, I loved it. There was a Japanese woman who was in the dorm with us in Honolulu. Of course, when I say older, she was 50 but I was only 25, I guess, at the time. H The high school where she taught had set up a scheme at the East West Center to retrain all their English teachers in new methods of teaching English because Japan knew this was the to go. So they divided all their English teachers into three or four batches and this woman lived in the dorm with us. We were terribly impressed that an "older" woman like that would come and live with us kids. And it was an international dorm; it wasn't just Americans. It was Filipinos and Samoans and everybody from 30 Asian countries. This teacher's family became like my host family in Japan. She's now dead; she and her husband had visited my parents then and now I know the fourth generation. I know the whole family, including her great-grandchildren since we've kept up over the years. During the holidays I would go up to Tokyo but I lived in Kyoto and studied.

Q: How was Kyoto?

FURGAL: Oh, wonderful. It was wonderful.

Q: I went there with my wife when I was in Korea. We stayed at the Inn of the Three Sisters, which was a place for, basically for foreigners and we spent a wonderful time there.

FURGAL: You know, I really enjoyed it. At the time, living with a family and learning the language was tough because they didn't have any English. But there was a group of Catholic nuns down the street with one or two Americans, I could go talk to when I wanted to. One of the nuns there, a Japanese convert, had a mother who had a room and I ended up staying with that family for six months and then with a doctor's family for six months. Subsequently, when my husband and I went back on a very delayed honeymoon, we visited both of those families.

Q: Well, were you studying the language or history or what were you studying?

FURGAL: When I was there in Japan it was strictly language. I took a little calligraphy and flower arranging and but it was mainly language. But I never had enough language to do anything with and when I came back-it's jumping the gun a little bit-but when I finally came to FSI, that was for Foreign Service training, they wouldn't test my Japanese because they said graduate school Japanese is too old. I am sorry that I did not insist but when you're in two, three days and you're a wet behind the ears Junior Officer, you don't push those things. I should have said I want it tested. I could have gotten it on record; I still had some residual Japanese but I never was sent to Japan so it was a waste of federally-funded training.



Q: Well then, you were there in Japan in 19, was it-

FURGAL: '66 to '67.

Q: How was the- were you picking up how the Vietnam War was playing at that time?

FURGAL: Not that I remember. When I came back there were a few riots on campus; not riots, exactly but demonstrations. And one EWC student, flunked out since he became so active in anti-Vietnam War issues. But I don't remember having terrifically strong feelings; we lived in a bit of an ivory tower in Honolulu. We had some Vietnamese students but no Chinese Afghani students. An EWC American student, who was majoring in Chinese, became a Canadian citizen so he could go to China to do his PhD research.. I often wonder what happened to him and what he thinks now. Now there are plenty of Chinese students and researchers at the EWC.

Q: Did you get any feel for, while you were in Japan, did you have any contact with the embassy or consulate?

FURGAL: No, we kept arm's distance from them. We had to go to the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo once in a while and or to the consulate in Kyoto. At that time, they had a CAO; in Kyoto.

Q: Cultural Affairs Officer.

FURGAL: Yes. He could have been the branch PAO (Public Affairs Officer) He had us over to his house, those American students who were on federal grants I remember he had two little kids running around and they were speaking English to him and Japanese to each other. They had this lovely house, and being young, we said to each other "look at these official Americans and the way they live. They don't mix with the local people, the way we do." We were all living with families and going to language school, taking the metro and going to public bath houses. Ten years later I end up doing the same thing.

Q: Well of course. I mean, there's nothing like being down there, you know; you're really- this is a Peace Corps-

FURGAL: It was a Peace Corps mentality for sure but there was no Peace Corps, of course, in Japan. However, Peace Corps had begun by that time.

Q: Well then, again, I keep asking the question-



FURGAL: What was I?

Q: Pointing towards?

FURGAL: Well, somehow I knew I didn't want to teach but, I had spent four wonderful years in all, getting an MA in history. That doesn't normally take people four years to do, but it was a wonderful intercultural experience. The benefit of that far outweighed the benefit of studying Japanese, Chinese and Korean history, which was all very interesting at the time but that whole experience did imprint Asia indelibly on my mind. You know, they often say your first overseas experience decides you for life. Well, not me. I liked Vienna very much but I had not much interest other than as a tourist in returning. Asia is where my real love is; the East West Center at that time was such a grand cultural experiment. Of course, in those days there was no Bangladesh but Indians and Pakistanis were living together and Cambodian with Vietnamese; Americans were always paired with Asians. Students from the South Pacific were also in residence. To my tame Midwestern upbringing, some of the Samoans and Fijians seemed like were wild men.

Q: I was wondering about the Samoans, I was thinking very big people, men and women, with bushy hair sticking out. It used to be kind of frightening almost if you were in a roomful of them or something.

FURGAL: Well, these Samoan women were wonderful; I still remember their first names. I would love to see them again. I still have a letter one of them wrote me. I was a very innocent 24 year old; several of us lived in the men's dorm; we were segregated on two floors and the male students were above.. Well, these women were both married, had families and husbands at home, but they would "visit" up stairs at night; it was just a different way of looking at matrimonial obligations.. These women were perfectly lovely people and, before leaving, they both wrote me a letter saying we may have done things you didn't particularly understand or approve of but we wish the best for you and we want you to know how much we appreciate your friendship. I kept that note all these years; it was such a touching thing to do and it was such an educational thing for me. I had good Filipino friends, I hung around with them because I belonged to Newman Club, which is the club on campus for Catholic students;. The American women used to get upset because the American men only wanted to date Asian women. Very few American-American weddings resulted from studying at the EWC but a lot of American-Asian weddings did. It was a great education, in more ways than one. Without those years at the EWC, I am sure that I would not have entered the Foreign Service.



Q: Well, did you find yourself up against the phenomenon that I understand happens, particularly at the universities in California, where the Japanese students or the Korean students worked so hard that they usually scare the hell out of American, you know, sort of Caucasian students because their grades are so good.

FURGAL: I don't think that happened in those days at the EWC. The East West Center emphasized what we called "inter-culturation", the social mixing and getting to know each other's cultures, in addition to academics. Students from various countries would stage programs of their music and dance and students from other areas would help. So the students that came from those countries you mentioned were not perceived to be as competitive as they were later on.. In addition to receiving their degrees, they were as interested in getting to know each other.

Q: Did you feel at all the heavy hand of the American Government trying to sell its ideas or anything like that?

FURGAL: Not in those days, not at the East West Center. Now, after we left that began to change a little bit because there was one congressman from upstate New York who started investigating the budget. The idea behind the formation of the EWC was to educate Americans and Asians, first of all to get to know each other on a level beyond the diplomatic, then for the alumni to go into professions where an understanding of Asia was important. We didn't learn much about Japan until after the Second World War; or about Vietnam until after the Vietnamese War. Hopefully we'll learn something about Iraq and Iran before the current situation is over. Although there was an emphasis on intercultural, we had to get our degrees. There were a few who danced in too many shows and never finished their degrees. But because of the Congressman and the Vietnam War, budgets were cut and the emphasis was placed more on research after that. Alumni in general do not approve of this as they prefer that students receive the bulk of the funding..

Q: So you got your Masters degree and left there when?

FURGAL: '68

Q: So what happened then?



FURGAL: I went home for six months and couldn't get a job. I didn't have enough Japanese to teach it or to work with Japanese as a translator or anything else. Fortunately my parents were still alive and living in the area so I moved in and looked for a job, I ended up at the University of Illinois Chicago Circle campus, in the audiovisual department. I think I stayed there maybe one or two years but I met my husband there, which was probably the main benefit. But I ended up going to library school because I had always tended toward that and had kept in touch with the woman from whom I had taken a library science course in college. So I went over to the University of Chicago because they had a dual program in library science and Asian languages.

Q: This is in Chicago?

FURGAL: University of Chicago.

Q: This is not Roosevelt University.

FURGAL: No, the University of Chicago, the Rockefeller-funded institution on the south side. And growing up of course I'd never heard about it because we didn't discuss things like that. But I talked to them about going to library school, and with my background in Japanese, doing the dual degree. The counselor recommended against it, saying that because of the fact I wasn't a Japanese by heritage, the language competition would be overwhelming; other people coming to study had grown up speaking Japanese. She thought I could finish in a year because of my previous Masters degree. So I saw the wisdom of her advice and quit my job at University of Illinois.- I did my year's work and finished the course work for a Master's degree in library science. We got married on a Saturday, my husband started graduate school on Monday and then I did my thesis while I was working. I was a reference librarian for seven years.

Q: Well tell me, I heard the expression "library science" and all; what was being taught and what were you getting out of it at that time?



FURGAL: Well, when I went into the field it was not computerized; I predated computerization of the field. We learned how to catalog books, how to answer reference questions, how to administer a library, how to select books. There's a big difference between a special library and a public library and a hospital library and a bank library, fields like that. It was a year's study and we had quite a variety of courses. University of Chicago was the first library school in which a computer course was mandatory. I went to library school in '71; because we married- no, I went in 1970. We got married in '71. I started working at a suburban public library as a reference librarian and preparing my thesis, a survey of the audiovisual resources of the public libraries in the state of Illinois I really enjoyed being a reference librarian. You know, librarians are wont to way that you don't have to know anything; you just have to know where to find the answer but now of course, there's Google. At the- University of Chicago, we had to take a computer course. I barely made it through; I it was the only C, I ever got in graduate school.

Q: Well, was it programming at the time?

FURGAL: That was when we used to have those little sticks that went through the cards.

Q: Oh yes.

FURGAL: You probably never heard of that. Little sticks and you'd pull the sticks up.

Q: It's a knitting needle; it's called the Royal McBee System.

FURGAL: Yes.

Q: Actually, in a way it was computers because it was either or.

FURGAL: It was the basis, sure.

Q: It was- the hole was either clipped out or not clipped out.

FURGAL: Yes.

Q: I remember doing that in personnel in the State Department. If you wanted to find somebody who was unmarried, spoke Japanese and was under 30 you could stick a knitting needle into these cards and come out with whomever met the criteria.



FURGAL: I spent a year there and I lived on the South Side near campus. After my husband and I were married, we lived in the Chicago area for seven years.

But to back up, you asked what I was looking for in the end. At East West Center, one of my advisors said to me, why don't you think about the Foreign Service? I said, what's the Foreign Service? I mean, I really didn't know much about it then. He explained the work and said you can take the exam right here; it's given once a year. So I took the exam in '68, passed and went back to Chicago. Those were the days when the process took even longer than it does now; so I started looking for a job and took some months to find one. But I was dating my husband and somebody else at the time and I'd been away from home for four years; I was just really getting comfortable, being back home, and the training division called and said well, can you come for a training class? And I said no. I turned it down, which, in retrospect, was probably good. I would have gotten my Japanese but I probably would never have gotten married; that was in the days when women officers couldn't be married. And so I remained in Chicago got married. My husband had just come back from four years in the service, one year in Vietnam, and he was finishing his undergraduate degree and then he started graduate school; he has a Masters degree in social work from University of Illinois. We talked about how we both liked living overseas and traveling and we said, let's try the Foreign Service again. So we both took the exam, passed both the written and the oral portions. In fact, I think we did it twice. I was called to DC first and his eligibility lapsed two different times; we were later told that the mid-'70s, the English entry score was higher for white males.

Our DCM (deputy chief of mission) in Bangladesh told us years later.. So my husband came over as my dependent the first tour and then he got tired of not working full-time.

Q: Let's go back just a bit. What's the background of your husband?

FURGAL: Polish.

Q: And where did he grow up?

FURGAL: Polish area of Chicago. And his mother was three fourths German, one fourth Irish but his paternal side was all Polish. They used to say his father was three parts; he was conceived in Poland, spent three months inside on the ship and was born when they got to the U.S. But he was born in the U.S.

Q: Where did he go to college?



FURGAL: My husband?

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: He finished at the University of Illinois. He was active in the '60s in the civil rights movement and attended junior college, a two year college, because his family had even less money than my dad. His dad was a cab driver and a janitor until he became a precinct captain for Mayor Daly; things got a little better then but not much. After two years in Wright junior college in Chicago, he went to Western Illinois University but became so active in the civil rights movement that he flunked out. And then Kennedy was assassinated and he joined the army. He applied to become a conscientious objector when he was first drafted but was told that a Catholic couldn't be a conscientious objector because there were Catholic priests who were chaplains. And he said okay, but I refuse to carry a gun; the draft board then said "okay, you have to go in for four years then. If you admit to carrying a gun you can do two years." So he spent four years in the army.

Q: Well then, you met at-

FURGAL: University of Illinois, Chicago where he was finishing his BA and then his MA before he became a social worker.

Q: How long were you- You were a reference librarian where?

FURGAL: A couple of suburban libraries in the Chicago area and a Chicago public library, and my last one, which I quit after seven months to join the Foreign Service, was Continental Illinois Bank Library. I If we hadn't, I probably would have stayed a special librarian because I enjoyed that.

Q: I have no comprehension. What was a librarian at the Continental Bank was it?

FURGAL: Continental Bank doesn't exist under that name anymore. I don't know who' owns it now.

Q: I mean, but what does one do?



FURGAL: Well, there were all these young financial types who didn't know how to find anything. The librarians would show them how to use Standard & Poor's or do some research for them. By that time we were a little bit more computerized. That's when The New York Times started their fact file on the computer. I left the library field just when computers were becoming significant in library work in the mid '70s. We had decided whoever got the first call to go to DC for training would do it and off I went to DC in '78. My husband stayed behind in Chicago and continued working until I was ready to go overseas.

Q: Well, you came into the Foreign Service in '78 then?

FURGAL: '78

Q: Were you in USIA (United States Information Agency) at that time?

FURGAL: Oh, definitely. I would not have gone into the State Department as my background was not appropriate. I had been a foreign student twice and was involved in cultural exchange so I deliberately chose USIA.

Q: How did the training go?

FURGAL: Well, some of it I think was not useful. We sometimes trained with State Department junior officers but not very often. Once we were supposed to be doing a little mini movie in McPherson Square but never did that stuff overseas; that's what FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) did. We should have been studying public speaking techniques instead. In those days you had to be language qualified before you went overseas so willy-nilly, those of us who did not come in with a workable language qualified were given either French or Spanish. I was given Spanish and I never served in a Spanish speaking country. Never. I'm delighted with where I ended up since Asia was my primary interest and field of study.

Q: Well, where was your first assignment?

FURGAL: Sri Lanka.

Q: You were in Sri Lanka from when to when?



FURGAL: I went to Washington in '78 and Sri Lanka in the fall of '79 to summer of '80. My first tour was a short one because it was considered a training tour And we were there 10 months in Sri Lanka and from Sri Lanka we went to India. My husband was my dependent in Sri Lanka, the only male dependent at that time. It was a funny situation; they wouldn't let him join the American Women's Club. It was a very small post, only 12 staff in all, and there was no the American Dependent's Club. The women's movement in the '70s did a lot for the Foreign Service. I heard that Tezi Schaffer and Jane Coon and a couple of other Senior Foreign Service women had to drop out when they married And then when the laws were changed, to its credit the State Department invited the women they could find to be reinstated and these people came back in. Finally when we went up to Madras Joe got tired of not working. So he went in as a communicator and later became a human relations/personnel specialist.. But when we went back to Sri Lanka, 1990 to 1993, on our second tandem assignment there were nine dependent husbands. Tezi Schaffer was the ambassador and Howie Schaffer was the dependent spouse. There were nine dependent husbands and when we were there 10 years previously, there wasn't one.

Q: Let's talk about Bangladesh in, was it '78-'79?

FURGAL: No, Bangladesh was '84 to '86. When we went to Madras (now Chennai) I was there '80-'83 but Joe left after a year for communications training and then Nepal.

Q: We're talking about- Your first post was Bangladesh.

FURGAL: No, Sri Lanka.

Q: I mean Sri Lanka. Okay, you were in Sri Lanka '78-'79 was it?

FURGAL: Seventy-nine-'80.

Q: Seventy-nine-'80. What was the situation in Sri Lanka at the time?

FURGAL: It wasn't as bad as when we went back in '90.. We were there at a quiet time. The language changes had already taken place. Previously everybody studied in English but in the mid-'50s, the prime minister husband mandated a change to Tamil or Sinhala. Since that had already gone through, the political situation seemed relatively calm to us. And we had no problems traveling; we went all over the country, even north to Jaffna. When we went back 10 years later, because we left there in '80 and went back in '90, there was definite change.



Q: Well, who was the ambassador when you arrived in Sri Lanka?

FURGAL: The first time was Howard Wriggins, the academic.

Q: Who?

FURGAL: Wriggins. He was a political appointee but he was an academic who knew the area well. The man who took his place was a career diplomat who went to the Colombo Plan after that and later died in a plane crash. We only knew Professor Wriggins.

Q: How did you find the embassy at that point?

FURGAL: Well, you know, we were pretty lowly JOs (Junior Officers). I mean, I was; my husband was my dependent in those days when it was pretty scandalous to have a male dependent. I was the oldest in my class, too; this was a second career. I was 40 years old by the time we got to Sri Lanka. So I was kind of an odd bird. You know, I had some bosses younger than me because they had entered in their 20s so.

I remember one woman inviting us for Thanksgiving dinner. I thought my goodness, why is she inviting us for Thanksgiving dinner; she hardly knows us? We weren't used to that embassy form of hospitality, when you automatically invite any new staff. We got into that habit ourselves but that time I remember thinking how unusual it was. I also remember she wore short skirts which was no longer being done in the U.S. And I thought, well of course, she's been out for a long time; she doesn't realize how fashions have changed. But it was a funny thing to remember.

Q: Well, you were what, the librarian?

FURGAL: No, I was a generalist. I was not a specialist. I was a CAO (Cultural Affairs Officer).

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

FURGAL: Well, you know, when you were a JO you followed the CAO around and did whatever he told you to do.

Q: Cultural Affairs Officer.



FURGAL: Cultural Affairs Officer. Basically, a CAO handled the speaking tours, the Fulbright program, the East West Center program, the short and long term exchange programs, the cultural visits. I've been fortunate; I've done that my whole life. I successfully avoided being an IO.

Q: Information Officer.

FURGAL: Information Officer.

Q: That's for the press.

FURGAL: That's the press, right.

Q: Well, what were relations with the United States at that time?

FURGAL: The first time I was in Sri Lanka?

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: I don't know but I suspect they were okay. We never felt any personal animosity, any difficulties on the streets; nothing. I never really did in any of the posts I was in.

Q: Did you feel- Was the United States- did you feel was an important factor there or were you just another embassy or what?

FURGAL: I think at that time the British and the Indians were a little more important than we were. James Spain, whose name you might recognize, was still retired and living there.

Q: I've interviewed him, yes.

FURGAL: The poor man is no more, right?

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: He passed relatively recently. I'd like to read his book.



Q: He'd written a book, which we published, I think.

FURGAL: Oh, okay.

Q: Were there many Sri Lankans coming to the United States, either to study or Fulbrights or just going to get educated?

FURGAL: I think so. The consular officer would have a better idea of numbers. Our grants to Sri Lanka have always been very small. When I was there the second time, I helped organize the East West Center Alumni Association, which still exists. The number of grants dwindled over the years because of money going towards the Vietnam War and other situations. But I think there's really only one country that I've been in where relations were not so good and mainly that was after I left anyway; that was my last overseas post - Zimbabwe

Q: Well, how about in your work did the Sinhalese/Tamil division play any role in the embassy or your work at all at that time?

FURGAL: That came during my second tour. When we went back to Colombo in '90, we could not go north anymore to Jaffna. We used to go to Trincomalee, the wonderful British harbor during the Second World War; one of the most beautiful beaches I've ever seen. We were there the first time since we joined the Sri Lanka Wildlife and Preservation Society. The organization used to have once a month meetings where we met both Tamils and Sinhalese we'd go on monthly field trips. When we went back, that organization barely existed. And there was a much more palpable sense of division. Another ethnic group are the Burghers, descendants of the Dutch and the English. Burghers were similar to those in India, especially in the professions, like the railroads and government. One of the local employees who was a Burgher went to Bill Maurer, the Public Affairs Officer, and told him not to hire a Tamil secretary because it would lead to too much trouble among the staff. And the head librarian at the American Cultural Center was a Tamil who retired in time to get his daughter into the U.S. on the green card.. It's been difficult for the Tamils, I think.

Q: What was life like there, for you?

FURGAL: It was fine both times We could travel; we could walk wherever we wanted to and never felt threatened. Both times we didn't have any difficulty personally living there.



Q: How did you feel about the, you know, Foreign Service life? Was it kind of fun?

FURGAL: Yes. We would not have stayed in, if we had not enjoyed it. Since we were both in our second careers, we were not as professionally ambitious as younger officers seemed to be. People always ask what our favorite post was, what it was like living there, and I say we liked them all, and disliked them all, for some reason. You either didn't like your staff or you didn't like the country or you didn't like the ambassador or you did or- for whatever reason. I believe there's no perfect job but all in all, we're glad we did it. You give up certain things, you know; you miss your family, you don't see your nieces and nephews growing up. If we'd stayed in this country who knows, maybe we would have had children or adopted but I was already 40 years old when we went in so it was unlikely. But the opportunity to live in another country and to experience day-to-day life was priceless. I also felt like I was doing something worthwhile. I wasn't saying no to people, which I think unfortunately a consular officer has to do a lot.. The work I was doing helped to build better relations between the countries because the kind of programs that I administered had long term value.

Q: How about the Fulbright program? You were working on Fulbright Program?

FURGAL: Yes.

Q: How was that working?

FURGAL: Oh, very well. We think it should be funded at a much higher level. It's significant that India has given enough money to the program that their Commission is now considered a bi-national one. It didn't used to be since the U.S. Government contributed the bulk of the funding. Germany also gives more money to the Fulbright program than the U.S. does. This means that other countries are able to make some of the decisions. You have to weigh the benefits of giving up some control but I think all in all it's better that way.

Q: Was America seen as a place to go to get a higher degree, particularly some of the areas where we go and sort of computerize education but also in business management and all; was this a place that the Sri Lankans were looking to improve their skills and business type things?



FURGAL: I think that tended to be more in the sciences and business. The Fulbright program used to put more of an emphasis on the arts and culture and younger people. That was Senator Fulbright's idea but over the years, the program attracted more MA and pre-PhD students than post-BA students. There was a program for graduating college and university seniors in which a student didn't have to have very much of an idea of what they wanted to study. The purpose was to explore a field of interest. We had one young art student who tried to sell his art work in the library which was a big no-no. All the Fulbright programs are wonderful. There's a very active Fulbright alumni chapter here in the DC area which I joined just to see what they were doing. Working with exchange programs is one of the few things that I miss about not working.

Q: We've been doing this and it sort of sounds like half the educated population of China has ended up coming here now.

FURGAL: When we were young, we used to pray for the conversion of Russia at church and now we can talk with Chinese and Russians in person I remember meeting my first Russian person face to face; it was really exciting.

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: Things have changed a whole lot. I think it's a pity, although I can see why it was done, that USIA was absorbed into the State Department. So far, a fire-wall is protecting former USIA program funds but I don't think that will last in an era of tight budgets. It is difficult for Congress to see the benefit of long term education programs, The investment in my education and those of my student friends at the East West Center took a long time to show a benefit whereas a bomber or a trade route shows a much quicker return.

Q: You know, my prejudice is that the whole exchange program has probably been the most potent weapon that we've had in our foreign policy quiver.

Well, I'm thinking this is probably a good place to stop now. And we'll pick this up the next time - I put at the end here where we are - pick it up the next time in 1979?

FURGAL: Nineteen seventy-nine when we left for our first tour.

Q: Okay, where did you go?

FURGAL: That was Sri Lanka in '79. We were there twice.



Q: Okay. But you left Sri Lanka in what?

FURGAL: 1980.

Q: Where did you go then?

FURGAL: Madras (Chennai).

Q: Okay, we'll pick this up, you're off to Madras, 1980.

Today is the 3rd of September, 2008. This is an interview with Mary Jo Furgal. Mary Jo, we had left it- you're off for, is it Laos?

FURGAL: I left Sri Lanka in the summer of '80.

Q: And then where did you go?

FURGAL: I went to Madras for three years.

Q: Madras. Okay. Let's talk about Madras, '80 to '82?

FURGAL: '83

Q: '83. What was Madras like at that time?

FURGAL: Climatically, it was very hot but not that much different, I guess, from Sri Lanka. However, it was very much bigger than Sri Lanka. It was a very conservative city. It was the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu and the consular section at that time had the four southern states. There were four or five consulates in India at that time and USIS had four officers in Madras alone. It's gone back up to two or three now but a couple of years after I left it went down to three then to two and, at one point, I think they only had one. Of course that was after USIS was absorbed into the State Department. It's starting to build back up a little bit now.

Q: What were you doing there?



FURGAL: Well, I guess you could say I was an assistant cultural affairs officer at that time.

Q: In the first place, what about that tip of, southern tip of India? Where did it fit sort of politically? Was it- what was the political situation?

FURGAL: Well, it didn't have a communist government as the neighboring state of Kerala. Kerala was the only communist state in India at that time; that's intriguing because it also had the lowest birth rate and the highest literacy rate, especially for women. Of course, this was the '80s and McCarthyism was over by that time but politicians found that odd, the fact that the communist government seemed to be doing a slightly better job than India did in some of the other states.

Q: Well was that, you know, for us sitting there did we see that it's because they probably had a better government or?

FURGAL: It's a good question.

Q: Or was it cultural or?

FURGAL: I think the reasons are varied perhaps somewhat ethnically but also religiously. In addition to the Hindu majority, there was a sizable group of Syrian Christians down there. I don't know how the political section would answer your question but I was very junior at that time. I wasn't really that involved in political matters at post nor was I, before I joined the Foreign Service. I think probably that's one of the reasons that if we had been one big happy family at that time I probably wouldn't even have gone into the State Department; My interests and- my background were not in political or economic affairs; I had was always more interested in the cultural, educational and historical events

Q: Cultural side. Fair enough.

FURGAL: Student exchange type of programs.

Q: Well, who was consul general?

FURGAL: Doug Cochran.



Q: And how big was the post?

FURGAL: I think it was one of the smallest we were ever in. There were only 12 people and that was everybody from the one chap in the code room, whatever they called it at the time.

Q: Communicator.

FURGAL: Communicator, right. And this consul general had his own American secretary and we had four people in USIS. There was only one consular officer; maybe one and a half because the other half worked in other offices occasionally.. So it was small.

Q: Well, what were you up to?

FURGAL: Well, mainly cultural and educational programs. I was lucky I survived because my late boss who will remain nameless, was an alcoholic. He was only pulled out after the inspectors came to India and talked to the people in Embassy New Delhi. The inspectors happened to call the consular general one day when my boss was berating his secretary. She just burst into tears and he was finally removed but before that junior officers were just swinging in the wind.. And if I hadn't been tenured I probably wouldn't have survived. He never came back from lunch sober. It was pretty bad.

Q: How does this work? I mean, was this sort of a conspiracy of silence or what?

FURGAL: I think so. One of the big differences we noticed after coming back to the U.S. for a couple of years and then going back out, was that there was a lot less drinking in the '90s I don't know how you found that but when we first went in, I was almost 40; being the oldest in the class, I was from that generation of women who had benefited from the change, i.e. that an officer could be married. You know how it was in the old days; if a woman married, she could not be an officer. That was one reason, among others, that I turned down my first chance to join USIA. In 1968, I was still single but I was dating at that time; years later we decided to try it again and it worked.

You'd have cocktails and you'd have wine and you'd have drinks after dinner. When we went back in '90, many people didn't drink or would just have wine with dinner; there wasn't the constant pressure or supply of alcohol - I think partially it was a social change in the United States also.



Q: There really was a social change. I mean, just another thing, I remember I always kept a couple packs of cigarettes in my desk to offer to people, even when I quit. And we always had cigarettes at our dinner parties.

FURGAL: Right.

Q: Even, again, when I quit.

FURGAL: That's very similar. My husband used to smoke cigars and pipes, gave up years ago; I never smoked anything at all. But we did have ash trays; we've still got some of the stuff at home. I don't know what to do with it.

Q: Among our china ware we've got little containers to hold cigarettes which you'd put in front of somebody's plate so that after dinner you could have a cigarette.

FURGAL: That I never saw.

But we liked Madras, despite my problem boss. I had been an East Asian Studies major at the East West Center, which is probably the major reason I came into the State Department. I'd never even heard of such a career- that is, USIA or the Foreign Service, although I grew up in Chicago. We were lower middle class, I suppose, and no one in our family had ever had professional careers. I was the first girl to go to college so when one of my professors out at the East West Center said why don't you take the Foreign Service exam, I did and that's how it all started.

Q: Early 1980s, were we sort of treading water, did you feel, sort of culturally in India or were we doing something? What were we up to?



FURGAL: Well, the kind of work I did at that time emphasized cultural and educational exchange programs. The U.S. Government was still funding more of these programs than now. Now this was Madras and we're quite a distance from the capital in New Delhi. In New Delhi, even USIA would have gotten more involved in the political scene. My boss was pretty useless at that point. I think it was his last overseas tour; there were problems with his children and his wife was an enabler, in the current jargon. But my colleague left post a day early so he wouldn't have to say goodbye to him. On top of that, I had a dependent husband and this man was verbally abusive to my husband because he couldn't imagine a man letting a woman support him. We couldn't join the Madras Club because I was the officer and my husband was my dependent so we got in as associate members. But we had some very good Indian friends and we became involved in the local culture, picked up a love of Carnatic music and Bharata Natyam dancing. And we made useful contacts, that way. We also had an active Fulbright program and East West Center program, plus other long and short term exchanges I joined the Zonta Club, which is to women what the Elks and the Moose are to men. They didn't let women join Rotary in those days. I met local "movers and shakers" that way, important contacts for future programs. I think my most significant accomplishment in Madras, the most long lasting, was in cooperation with the Fulbright office, in Delhi. We had a small one in Madras run by a very competent woman who eventually came over here and worked for the Academy for Educational Development here in DC; she ended up as their head.. We put on a program that brought together important women leaders from a variety of groups doing social work, what educated and affluent Indian women did at the time. The Fulbright Commission in New Delhi sponsored a speaker, the local Fulbright Commission and USIS put on the program, and a rich local businessman sponsored a lunch and printed material. The end result was an organization called the Joint Action Council for Women, which eventually put up a shelter for battered women. It lasted for years after I left in '83, maybe good 15, 20 years. I'm not sure what it's called now and how it's working but it was the most successful project I was involved with in Madras.

Q: Were they having the situation in- where you were one reads about of women, you know, the husband's family essentially kills the wife after she's paid her dowry or something like that?

FURGAL: I don't think that happened as much in the south. You still hear about it occasionally in the north of the country but it's not as common now as it used to be.. Indian women, for the past several decades are much more educated. There's an emerging middle class which is probably bigger than this country just because there's a billion people there. But I think in the rural areas there's still that kind of spousal abuse.

Q: Did you have a library?

FURGAL: Yes, yes, and we kept it open for quite awhile.



Q: How was it used?

FURGAL: Oh, very well. I can't tell you, how many times years later, Indians of all backgrounds would say to me that's where they first learned about the United States and realized what this country is all about. They were free to go into the American Center and use whatever they wanted and read whatever they wanted and the staff just left them alone. We used to joke about denying access to a British woman married to an Indian journalist who used to publish the diatribes against the United States. She'd come in and do her research in our library so we were a little amused and annoyed at the same time. Of course, nobody ever did; she was free to come and go. The library was very well used. That's why I felt bad when they started closing down the libraries in a lot of countries. We lost a good opportunity to inform and influence at the same time.

Q: I think we made a terrible mistake on cutting down on the whole cultural field because this is so important.

FURGAL: It depends on how you define "culture." I could go to a Chinese concert here but I'd still read the newspapers about their human rights record. So if you had to choose one thing, I would keep the student exchanges. Not that I disliked the other USIS programs; I did a lot of them over the years. We did the speaker programs through which professors from the U.S. would come overseas and lecture but those generally have a very short term appeal. It also depends on the professors; the exchanges can do them more good because they go back with an increased insight into whatever country they lectured in. But if I had to choose one or two programs which I'd prefer not to, I'd go for the long term student/ university exchanges and the American libraries rather than the one or two week programs..

Q: Yes. Did you find, having been in Sri Lanka, was there much of a Tamil connection? I mean, were the Tamils of India a different breed of cat in a way?

FURGAL: I'm sure that in the '70s and '80s there was a lot more sympathy for the Tamils in Sri Lanka than there is now. I'm not a foreign relations expert, as you know, and as some of the people you interview tend to be, but it seemed, at least among the people I knew, sophisticated English speakers of various ethnicities, the mood changed in the 1990s after Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated.

Q: Well he was assassinated by a Tamil down in that area.



FURGAL: - I was in the Maldives at that time, it happened when I was in Sri Lanka the second time and was accredited to the Maldives. But we visited India a lot because we had friends there and since we stayed in the subcontinent, we were able to visit on our own when we wanted to;. We spent holidays there in Madras with friends who would come down to Sri Lanka. Because of this frequent contact, we knew that opinions about the Tamils in general changed when Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were both killed.

Q: Despite the fact that you had a very difficult supervisor, how did you work? I mean, did you have to sort of avoid him? Was this sort of duck and run out of the office and find somewhere else to work?

FURGAL: Well, there were four of us as we also had a deputy branch PAO (Public Affairs Officer). - It worked out but we never really related professionally. - I remember only one time we actually sat down and chatted as two professionals would. I was probably not that much younger than him; he was probably in his 50s at that point and by the time I arrived, I was probably 41. But it was difficult, however, especially for my husband because he had been a professional; he had passed the Foreign Service exam, both the written and oral portions, and the Selection Board just hadn't gotten down to his name on the list.

Q: What was he doing there?

FURGAL: He taught social work for awhile at the school of social work in Madras. He's a very self sufficient sort but he became bored after a while; so he became a communicator just to get his foot in the door because he had done that kind of work in Vietnam. I was alone in Madras about a year and a half while he was in Kathmandu. The assignments panel placed him at least as close to India as they could. There's, maybe not now but then, there was a lot of lip service given to tandems and a lot of resentment of tandems also.

Q: Yes, I know. It was, at the beginning it was a difficult program for a lot of people to swallow.

FURGAL: I can imagine. I looked on the Oral History citation that you gave me to see what keywords would lead a future researcher to cultural relations or tandems, the areas I know more about. I imagine that your submissions are pretty heavily weighted toward political and economic officers. I suppose that's what most of the books are written about. I don't think anybody will find mine because I can't say too much about those issues.



Q: But we are, you know, who knows how people will look at this, but I have a certain bias and I've always felt that the cultural section, particularly if this is your program, the exchange program, but also the libraries and all have probably had more of an impact than- well, I won't say than any other but probably a longer lasting impact because I think we have a very good story to sell.

FURGAL: I quite agree. The libraries and the way people talk about them even now, what they had meant to them when they were young students, is very impressive and touching. Being a professional librarian before the Foreign Service, I guess I look at the libraries a little differently than other cultural affairs officers might. We tried to recruit a Fulbrighter to come as a librarian; the university libraries in South Asia needed and wanted professional assistance. Some of those libraries looked like the reject room at the Chicago Public Library; books were in such ragged shape. It's ironic because one of the most famous early librarians in the world was an Indian by the name of Ramanujan. In the early part of the last century, he had devised a unique method of cataloging books. It wasn't the Dewey nor the Library of Congress systems, which are widely used now. An additional problem was that the Indian libraries were not well-funded.

Q: Well, you were there- during the time you were there did you get any feel for the students? Did you feel they were getting- university students particularly- did you feel they were getting a pretty good education or was it a mill or how did you- did you get any feel for this?

FURGAL: This was the early '80s but I think throughout the South Asian universities that we were familiar with, the best students would come out of the science and technology faculties. Now, this is before computers, by and large. There were excellent lecturers and professors in all faculties, i.e. the fine arts, languages, social sciences, history but they tended to attract students in the three-year B.A. Program. There was a four year honors program from which you had to graduate in order to get a Fulbright grant because the four-year program was comparable to our system. The three year programs tended to emphasize history and languages, subjects for use in their own system but the students from those faculties were not quite as competitive on an overall basis. The Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) were on par with our institutes of technology, such as the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago But I'm not sure about MIT, (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, not being a scientist. Students from the IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology), mostly left India for further studies or employment. I had a yoga teacher who was the only one in his class who was still in Madras.

Q: How stood the computer at that time? As an instrument? Was there much of it or-?

FURGAL: I think what we had were Wangs and we had machines of some sort in the library but I'm not sure they were even computers.



Q: They were probably just essentially word processing.

FURGAL: Could be. I don't remember when I got my first computer overseas.

Q: Okay. Well then you left in '83?

FURGAL: Eighty-three.

Q: Where did you go?

FURGAL: Well, I took a leave without pay because I realized that my husband's assignment cycle and mine would never get together unless I dropped out so I was granted a 10 month leave without pay. I went home on home leave and then I joined him for eight months in Kathmandu. When we left Kathmandu we went together to Dhaka and our assignment cycles were synchronized. I had a good time in Kathmandu.

Q: What was your impression of Kathmandu?

FURGAL: It was like 14th Century medieval Europe. We lived in a decent house by Western standards but it wasn't big; it was a duplex in a U.S. Government compound. AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) staff and the PAO's secretary lived next to us.

I liked Kathmandu a lot but it was the most or I should say the least developed place we lived in. But I worked for AID in contract. I guess you couldn't work for your own agency on contract if you were on leave without pay but you could work for another government agency. I trained a Nepali woman, one of the secretaries, to maintain their in-house library. Everybody had their books stashed in their own offices; and wouldn't share. These were the Americans; the U.S.A.I.D. head issued a fiat and we took all the books and set up a little library, a task which employed me six months, part-time. It was fun. We took one trek while I was there.

Q: Did you have, in getting the books did you sort of almost have to yank them from the people?

FURGAL: Fortunately some of that had been done but not all of it. But there was support after people realized how it worked and the benefits to all the staff. There were a lot of Peace Corps people in USAID; one third of the staff had been Peace Corps in the early Nepal batches. They just fell in love with the place.



Q: Who was the ambassador up there? Do you remember?

FURGAL: Jane Coon, I believe. You see, we get mixed up because from there we went to Dhaka and one Coon was in Dhaka the other was in Kathmandu. Which Coon was in which place I don't remember.

Q: We don't have to worry about that.

FURGAL: It's not important.

Q: Well, you went down to Dhaka from when to when?

FURGAL: We left Kathmandu '84 and went to Dhaka '84 to '86.

Q: What were you doing?

FURGAL: Then I was the APAO, (assistant public affairs officer) but essentially I was a CAO again. There's only two of us so the boss did the press work and I did the cultural.

Q: Now, Dhaka, you know, I've had very mixed reviews. Some people think it's a terrible place and other people said it's one of those hidden places in the Foreign Service that everybody talks about how awful it is but it was really great. How did you find it?

FURGAL: Oh, I loved it. I really liked it. The people were wonderful, just wonderful. There was almost nothing to see and do. I mean, after India, there wasn't nearly the amount of music and fine arts. The Muslims did not portray Allah, so the fine arts didn't really develop very well.

Q: I'm surprised because aren't the, the Bangladeshis, aren't they out of the Bengali culture and the Bengali culture is so rich.

FURGAL: The emphasis there was more on poetry and drama. You don't see a lot of art galleries. There's wood carvings and embroidery, items like that, but not portraits. Half of the country seem to be poets; it's just amazing. They would write a poem at the drop of a hat. My father died while I was there and zip, I was straight to the funeral home; the janitor wrote me a poem on the occasion.- When my husband was promoted he wrote another poem. It was amazing. We enjoyed it.



Q: Well, in the first place, were you hit at all by floods and things of that nature?

FURGAL: Not in Dhaka directly. The south, around the Sundarbans, were hardest hit. But we lived on the edge of a rice paddy and during the monsoons, it would be a lake. We personally didn't experience flood we did, however, when we were in Sri Lanka. We had friends that lost family heirlooms and had to be evacuated by Marines who came for them in little rowboats.

Q: What about on the cultural side, did we have a library there?

FURGAL: We had a library open to the public; what was nice about it was that my little office was in a separate area. It contained the library and the cultural affairs staff while the USIS headquarters were across town in the embassy. So I had a wonderful time in Dhaka.

I had two PAOs, one left after one year and one chap came a year after I did. They're both retired by now and not in the area. The second officer was gone often; I think I was acting PAO five times in less than a year; his father wasn't well, then his father died; his marriage was breaking up so he went home since his wife had not joined him at post, and finally to sign the divorce papers. He seemed to be out more than he was in post. It was good managerial experience for me but sad for him.

Q: Well, how about, did you get a feel for the students? The university there was an important part of your work?

FURGAL: Yes, it was the exchange and speaker programs, similar to the university situation, I described in Madras.. The student radicals and the ones that would periodically have demonstrations tended to be from the non-science faculties because they couldn't see a decent future. They got into university; their parents beggared themselves to support them and although they would get stipends, the dorms and the food was terrible. It was really kind of pathetic. And then after they received a three year degree in history; what would they do with it? There was no chance to go to the United States with a three-year degree and a limited pool of low-paying teaching jobs. So, in my experience, these would be the students who would demonstrate and become radicalized, much more so than science students.

Q: Did they attack your offices and all?



FURGAL: That would happen in Korea every spring, but not in the countries where I served. Bill Maurer, my boss the second time in Colombo, used to tell stories about the libraries in Korea; it seemed that every spring the students would riot, the American Center libraries would be ransacked, then repaired and it would start all over again.

Q: Did you have much connection at all there with our consul general in Calcutta or anything like that?

FURGAL: Not really; not at my level in Dhaka, anyway. There was probably more at my boss's level or through the political or the economic section. You know, Henry Kissinger was famous for saying that Bangladesh was the armpit of the universe. That attitude probably colored our reaction when we learned that we were going to Dhaka. We were not terribly happy in Kathmandu when we found out I remember the U.S.A.I.D. director's wife telling us how much we'd end up liking it and we did. It was the people; the people were so wonderful. They call them the Texans of South Asia, just really warm hearted and receptive to our outreach.

Q: Well, that's great. Did you feel we had a pretty good exchange program?

FURGAL: Well, we never thought we had enough grants. Europe still received proportionately more at that time. I think South Asia's getting a little more now because of the perceived Muslim situation..

Q: Well, was Islam a factor, a major factor in your work?

FURGAL: No. No, not then. I left there in '86 and I visited briefly in '91 to see my old staff. We used to say that the Bangladeshis were more Bengalis than they were Muslim. You didn't see a lot of women in burqas then; my staff were all Muslim but some drank, a few smoked, but during Ramadan, they kept Ramadan probably better than most Catholics keep Lent these days. They were wonderful people. In fact, there's one visiting in the States right now; we're going to see him in October.

Q: Well then, where did you go in '86?

FURGAL: '86, back here for three and a half years.

Q: What were you up to?



FURGAL: Well, for one and a half years, maybe, I was in the European office of the International Visitor Program (IVP), the short-term exchange program for professionals, because it interested me. The office was full of civil service people; I was the only Foreign Service person in there. So it wasn't particularly easy because I had an Asian background and they handled the European program, but it was a good experience because I found out at that end how the International Visitor Program worked. And then after a year, year and a half of that I went up to Foreign Service personnel for two years. I really liked that.

Q: Well did you find, when you were dealing with European exchange program, that this was sort of a different view of the program than you'd been getting from South Asia?

FURGAL: Not too much because we dealt with the mechanics. You're probably aware that the State Department contracts out the actual handling of the programs, in order to remove it from political influence. There were some people we invited that wouldn't participate in the program because they thought they were being bought by the U.S. Some of the contract agencies are Meridian House, the Academy for Education and Development, the AFL-CIO and others. Every three years I think, the contract is up for bid. Our IVP offices would negotiate between the posts and the contract agencies. Occasionally, we had to try to convince the ambassador no, he could not send his best friend to the U.S. because he was either too old or political, etc. So we handled the paperwork, rather than actually planning the individual programs throughout the U.S. I enjoyed it because I learned how the IVP program worked in the U.S. I would escort the grantees to one of the contract agencies. We had to convince them why they should really go to Des Moines, Iowa, or elsewhere instead of New York, because everybody thinks they're coming to the U.S. and can choose where they want to go. But that's not usually the case with these programs.

Q: In '88, then- No, I mean, you were there what, a year and a half in the-

FURGAL: In the European branch of the International Visitors Program, then part of USIA.

Q: And then you went to personnel.

FURGAL: Personnel for two years.

Q: What personnel, USIA personnel?

FURGAL: USIA, yes. We had everything separate in those days.



Q: How long were you there?

FURGAL: Two years, until I went overseas again. I was the area personnel officer for the Middle East and South Asia Bureau (NEA). Once my husband left being a communicator he became, a personnel specialist or as we now say human relations, I realized that our personnel system was different than State Department. We had separate career counselors and area personnel officers; whereas State had career counselors and technicians. We sat together on the panels, assigning people and I'd have to go up to Ed Penney, then NEA area director, and say no, indeed, the panel will not assign your choice to a post in New Delhi or Beijing or wherever. Reasons varied; this candidate may already have had several hardship posts so we did a lot of running between offices breaking the bad news. Sometimes good news, but.

Q: Did you find yourself, people were really going after, sort of getting close to you and saying hey, you got a good post, or something like that?

FURGAL: No, that happened more to the career counselors. But we sat in on the same assignment meetings once career counselors decided that so and so hadn't ever been in a so-called good post, had always been in a hardship post. they tried to put them in a place that person wanted. I was handling only NEA, I think, at that time but I only did the same for the East Asia and Pacific Bureau (EAP) for a short time when somebody was on leave. After the decisions were made, then we would have to "carry the water" up to the EAP front office or NEA front office and tell them the bad news or good news. But the career counselors were the ones that used to get that kind of thing.

Q: Well then, often you can sort of arrange your assignment. Where'd you go after that?

FURGAL: We only went to places where there were two jobs. So we did not have very much flexibility. And I was fortunate because I knew I just didn't have the feel for being an Information Officer although I had worked for a newspaper for two years. So we were fortunate that I always ended up or was able to make sure that I was a cultural affairs officer.

Q: Well, that's very good when you sort of know your specialty and can work at it. I mean, the whole idea of making people do things that they don't like to do, I mean, you don't gain anything.



FURGAL: A lot of people said that well, if you're ever going to be a Public Affairs Officer (PAO) you've got to do both information and cultural affairs work and I said I don't want to be a PAO. I was second career already; I was in my early 40s so I wasn't as ambitious or aggressively promoting myself as others might have. If I was younger maybe; if I had gone in in '68, '69 when I had my first chance maybe, but it wasn't worth it at that point.

Q: Yes, it's a different viewpoint.

Where'd you go?

FURGAL: We went back to Sri Lanka, '90 to '93, and that time there were a lot more problems. We had been there during a quiet time earlier but the political situation worsened in the '80s. We went back in '90 and things were heating up again. The president was assassinated, the vice admiral was assassinated and the joint operations command was blown up two blocks away from my office. But the U.S. Government in those days, reacted differently than they would today and didn't everybody; we stayed in place and carried on and we never felt concerned about our personal safety or that we might be in jeopardy.

Q: Was there concern, though, just walking down a street?

FURGAL: We were lucky. In all the places we were stationed, we never had, not even in countries where we stuck out like sore thumbs like Zimbabwe; no, I never had a bit of unease when we were stationed overseas. We were very, very lucky.

Q: Well then, you were in Sri Lanka, you were again the cultural affairs officer?

FURGAL: Yes.

Q: Was there a difference in attitude towards what you were doing and all?

FURGAL: Not really. We still had an open library. in Colombo, the capitol but unfortunately, when we were there the second time, we had to downsize. We closed our library in the old capital, the historic capital of Kandy. We took the books we wanted, gave the rest to the university library in Kandy and brought the librarian down to Colombo. She became our librarian in Colombo because fortunately we had an opening at that time so that worked out. But that was very sad; I think it was one of the hardest things Bill Maurer had to do; he was my boss there.



Q: Who was the ambassador?

FURGAL: During our three years, Tezi Schaffer was the second one and Marion Creekmore before her. I don't know if he's still alive. Poor chap had a heart attack when he was there and the embassy nurse saved him. And I think he left shortly thereafter. He didn't leave because of that but his term was up and then Tezi Schaffer came in. When we were in Bangladesh we worked for Howie Schaffer, so we were the only couple, at least at that time, that had worked for both Schaffers, one in one place and one in the other.

Q: Did you find- Were the people who used the library, which I assumed would be mainly sort of university students and all that-

FURGAL: Tended to be younger people.

Q: Were they more politicized then than you had seen before or was there much-?

FURGAL: I don't think so. Journalists, of course, used it. The first time we were there was before Afghanistan and the staff of the Russian embassy, which was directly across the street from the USIS library used to use it. After Afghanistan they were told they couldn't step foot in our place, not by us but by their bosses. Of course, by the time I came back, 1990, you know, '89 had passed and things were opening up again. Library use was pretty much the same with students and media types being frequent visitors. I think the university system in Sri Lanka was better than India. India's a much, much bigger country with many more universities I think the universities in New Delhi probably received more money and had more prestige, although the University of Madras was one of the oldest and it was well known and well regarded. But the universities in Colombo were very good.

Q: Well, was the- this was still too early, was it, for the computer revolution to hit there or-?

FURGAL: I think so, in those days. I'm trying to think of my office. I think I had one. You know, the things I tend to remember are the people and some of the programs I especially liked. But things like that escape me.

Q: Well, I mean, sometimes after equipment but there was a whole change in how things were done with sort of the Internet really starting hitting. This would be too early.



FURGAL: I think so. We spent a lot of time working on English speaking programs. One of the things that had made Sri Lanka unique was that they had a common system of education in English. But when President. Bandaranaike was in office in '57, he abolished that and started separate Tamil and the Sinhalese mediums of education. Well, they lost a whole generation of people that don't know each other and can't talk to each other. They are now going back to English medium and in the early '90s, we brought in Fulbrighters and other specialists to help build up the English faculty. Some new universities were also opened; one called the Open University is similar to what we do now on the Internet but they were doing it more with satellite centers.

Q: Do you remember any programs that particularly- you thought were particularly effective there during this time?

FURGAL: Not quite with the impact of the one in Madras that I described earlier but there were always the long and short term exchange programs, i.e., Fulbright, East West Center International Visitor Program, etc.. Each country I was in, well not quite each but in Madras, Dhaka, and Colombo, I started little chapters of the East West Center Alumni Association; these were very popular because people who had studied in the US could get together and carry on about the good old days. It gave them a little bit of a special identity. Alumni meetings here aren't always so important because we have many other institutional affiliations but in some of those countries, that affiliation was very important.

Q: I am told that they have sort of military people who have gone to Leavenworth, and you know, in certain countries where the military support in other words, this type of thing creates quite a bond.

FURGAL: We did do one project that was very good, and I regret that I never gave that FSN an award; I should have written him up but he's now retired. USIS (U.S. Information Service) published; a short paperback history of America. You might have seen it at one point during your career; it's been around a long time. We had that translated into Sinhala, one of the two local languages, accompanied by workshops. We took all the social science teachers at the high school level, some 240, and divided them into a couple of workshops over a period of a few years. We recruited Fulbrighters, both American and Sri Lankan to come and lecture. I remember one chap in particular, a Tamil Sri Lankan, who had studied in the U.S. When he came back, he tended to be a little anti-American but he taught his section beautifully. We would give them a little lunch and copies of this book, both in English and in Sinhala. Unfortunately then violence occurred, perhaps it was when the president was assassinated, before we could do one for the Tamil teachers, who had to travel from the Jaffna area to Colombo. I always felt badly that we were able to train the Sinhala teachers but we could do nothing for Tamil high school social science teachers. Then I left.



Q: Well you left when?

FURGAL: October of '93.

Q: Where'd you go then?

FURGAL: We came back here for Romanian language training, the only post we had that was language designated. So we came back for home leave, then area studies and language in January and went to Romania in summer of '94.

Q: And what was your husband doing?

FURGAL: He took Romanian language training also. He was a communicator in Dhaka and when we came back, he entered training for a lateral entry program that Jeannie Sprott, Ambassador Sprott's wife, ran.

Q: Yes, yes, the Mustang Program.

FURGAL: It was especially designed for secretaries and communicators to enter the specialist corps., as opposed to the officer cone. My husband was a personnel specialist, or as it is now known human relations.

Q: So you were in Bucharest from when to when?

FURGAL: Bucharest from summer of '94 to summer of '97.

Q: Oh.

FURGAL: That was our only language post and the only post where we didn't stick out like sore thumbs.

Q: Well, it must have been interesting because this was sort of after- considerable time after the- well, the 1980 or '79, '80 Ceausescu-



FURGAL: '89.

Q: Yes, '89.

FURGAL: We were there barely four and a half years after he was overthrown.

Q: So how did you find things there?

FURGAL: Well, living standards were different. There were no real supermarkets, only one place where foreigners would go to shop. By the time we left in '97 a little bit more was opening up but you still saw the effects. We liked Romania; well, we liked every place we were, basically, but Romania was especially interesting because it was our only reintroduction, if you will, to Western culture. We could go to the symphony every night; we could go to the opera for a dollar. Now, granted, it was still state subsidized; they don't do that as much anymore. The arts there are increasingly funded the way they are here in the U.S. but at that time you could go a couple of times a week if you wanted. These days, people on fixed income, especially the elderly, are having a hard time. If you don't have good English and no computer skills, if you're on a fixed income from the good old days, you're really have a hard time. Under the previous regime, everybody was badly off. Now, some are badly off, a few are okay and there's a struggling middle class.

Q: Well, how did you find your work there?



FURGAL: While we were there, the Marines were allowed to date. There had been a "no-fraternization" law previously. I think we were probably a little bit more careful about what we said because we lived in the community; we didn't live on a compound and we didn't find local people as friendly as they had been in other places. Under Ceausescu, everybody spied on everybody; everybody had to inform. You didn't get to choose your staff; your staff was sent to you by the Romanian foreign ministry and there were some people there who still probably had friends from the old regime., I had a staff member at the Fulbright Commission who told me about the '80s when the population was on limited caloric intake and one 40 watt light bulb a room. This is how people were told to live so that Ceausescu could pay off his foreign debt; he was a big hero to the West because of it but he starved his people. This staff member would put a glass of water by the bed at night so that when she wanted a drink, she didn't have to get out of bed and in the morning there'd be a crust of ice on the top. By the time we got there, living standards had improved a little The situation is much better now but the current economic crisis will impact them deeply. Romania didn't do as well as Hungary and Poland did; one of the theories floating around was that was because the religion was state controlled. The religion was Romanian Orthodox, and the patriarch was a local church man, as was the custom in all the Eastern European countries that were Orthodox. The countries that did the best in immediately reacting to the lifting of the Iron Curtain were those that had religious compatriots from outside the country, like the Polish Catholics and the Hungarian Lutherans. There were religious and national communities on the outside that supported them through the "Iron Curtain" period, whereas the Romanians didn't have anybody, nor did their neighbors, the Bulgarians.

Q: Did events, the break up of Yugoslavia have any effect?

FURGAL: No, not much that I am aware of. The Embassy political section would have followed this more closely than did USIS.

Q: The Romanian/Yugoslav, they don't really-

FURGAL: The Romanians think of themselves as Latins rather than Slavs but language is influenced by both; it was excruciating because of my age to learn that language.

Q: How did you find the students that you dealt with?



FURGAL: Well, the students that we dealt with were usually those who either wanted to go to the United States to study or took American Studies courses. We sponsored American studies programs there; we donated books and set up a little American studies corner at the University of Bucharest. We also had some rule of law programs. We set up a couple of American studies corners, in universities outside of the capitol. We sponsored one university exchange program at the University of Cluj, which established the first political science department in the country. It was a beautiful country; we'd love to go back.

Q: Well then, you left there in '90-?

FURGAL: '97.

Q: Ninety-seven. Whither?

FURGAL: Well, after home leave, to Zimbabwe, our only African assignment.

Q: That must have been quite a change, wasn't it?

FURGAL: Oh, yes, in a variety of ways. Romania was the only country where we had blended in. In India, if you dressed in Indian clothes and had a good tan, you could "pass" as an Indian. In Madras, we had many Indian friends and didn't socialize with the American crowd. The consulate there was very small, only a dozen staff in all, so we separated business from pleasure.. And in Zimbabwe, a much bigger place, we joined the local bird watching club otherwise you get sucked up in embassy social functions and you never meet any local people at all.

Q: How were- I mean, did you get any feel was the government- of course, we're going now through a very difficult time in Zimbabwe; Mugabe has just destroyed the country practically. But did you feel any particular effects or how were things there?



FURGAL: Well, we were there at the end of the good times. We went there in the fall of '97 and I think early in '98, President Mugabe gave a big bonus to the war veterans, an act which is blamed for starting the economic downturn. At that time he still had a lot of military in the Congo, a variety of reasons; these soldiers were sending money back and building big houses. People weren't being told how many people were being killed; at nighttime they'd hear the planes coming in because the government didn't want them to know the numbers of the dead and injured. It kind of reminded me when the U.S. Government wouldn't let the media take pictures of the coffins of soldiers killed in Iraq, out of respect for the families. I absolutely had no worry about walking in the street; at lunch I'd go to a local little shop and pick up something. But the longer we were there, the worse it got; white farms began to be invaded. During the first parliamentary elections in February of 2000, my colleague and I, were election observers. We didn't know until that very morning if we were going to be allowed to participate. That is when Morgan Tsvangirai got his first real boost in popularity. We traveled to the north of the country, around the city of Mutare, to observe the proceedings of the two-day election. I was so impressed with how hard they worked to make those elections be honest. Some of them were in school buildings where there was no electricity. When it got close to night, they were voting by candlelight. Because the election had to be run over two days, local political workers would sleep with the ballot boxes at night so they couldn't be stolen and stuffed. It was just one of the most amazing experiences; it still gives me the goose bumps just thinking about it.

Q: How did the election come out?

FURGAL: Well, Tsvangirai did very well but of course, President Mugabe wouldn't concede. It depends on who you believe whether or not it was out and out stolen.. This time he wasn't quite able to get away with it, the same way he did in 2000. After we left, the situation got worse and worse. But it was never like Rwanda or Congo or Kenya; there weren't the riots in the streets. If you were just in Harare or Bulawayo, you wouldn't really know how bad things were economically. You would if you went into the stores, of course, and it is very obvious now, compared when we visited in 2004. There was a 22 aisle cash register supermarket walking distance from the house where we lived. At that time, Harare was really kind of a jewel. of a posting. When we lived there, only 4,000 white farmers controlled 60 percent of the arable land or 80 percent of the total land. So the system was vastly inequitable and, consequently, Mugabe has had honest to God support from a lot of people because of that. It was not a good system but the way he went around trying to change it, created more problems. I don't know if the Brits made it any better because they're seen as former colonists, you know. After going to South Africa for an Elderhostel, we flew to Harare to see our staff and friends up there. The Zimbabweans were very friendly; we were invited to more black homes than we were to white homes.

Q: Well how was your program? How were your programs there?



FURGAL: We kept the library open. We had active Fulbright and Hubert Humphrey programs, plus the short and the long term exchange programs. But no East West Center programs, of course, because the country wasn't a part of Asia. But it was very similar to all the other programs I've managed, not much difference.

Q: Did you feel any sort of political pressure on you, what you were doing or anything like that?

FURGAL: No, Americans at that time were well-regarded and we never felt any unease. A unique feature of that posting was that, by and large, there was more interest on the part of the embassy there in the IV program. In Madras, the consulate wasn't terribly interested.. We just picked who we thought fit the parameters, were young enough and so on, but in Romania and in Zimbabwe, we had very active input from other sections of the embassy. That to me was quite a surprise and consequently US.I.S didn't always get the people we considered more appropriate. Zimbabwe was a rewarding posting, our only one in Africa so we're glad we did it..

Q: Was there a, at that time a pretty good educational system to supply the educated elite?

FURGAL: It was starting to go down like everything else. But the university in Zimbabwe had been an all white institution and then in the '60s and the '70s, leading up to independence, a few black students started enrolling. Before Independence, a lot of them were sent to the United States for education by missionaries because they couldn't attend university locally. And while they were here they met Americans, both black and white, and after independence, they went back to Zimbabwe and were very active professionally I feel sorry for them now because they made a life decision; they could have stayed here but they went back to help. The university did have computers and a decent library; it was a lovely campus.. We did a lot of programs over there, especially in political science and rule of law. I had a girlfriend who was a librarian come over on vacation; I brought her to campus where she gave a lecture and subsequently hosted a librarian from there at her university in Towson, Maryland. It was a good university but it's been closed off and on so much in the last 10 years that it's not what it once was.

Q: Well, you left there when?

FURGAL: 2000

Q: And then what?



FURGAL: I came back here and I started to work in EAP/PD, the Public Diplomacy part of the East Asia and Pacific Bureau. By that time the merger had taken place so I came back to EAP and it was in the State Department by that time.

Q: EAP being-

FURGAL: East Asia and Pacific, right. And I was what they called a cultural coordinator. I was the liaison for the office between the EAP posts and the offices that ran all the student and other type of short and long-term exchanges, plus the cultural and lecture programs. Those offices were located in the old USIA building so I "commuted" between the main State Department building and State Annex-42.

Q: You did that for how long?

FURGAL: Three years and then I retired.

Q: How did you find- Did you feel the impact of this amalgamation of USIA and the State?

FURGAL: Overseas, no, because State Department was fairly gentle with us. In some of the stories I have heard, about other posts, workers were sent to the Public Affairs Officer's house and took all the china away the first week. We were able in Harare to keep designated cars because of distribution of press releases and because we weren't in the same building.. So it wasn't too bad, really, overseas. And back in Washington, since I was in the old USIS Public Diplomacy Office, I was working with all people who were old USIS hands anyway. Paul Blackburn was my boss for two years and then some chap, whose name escapes me.

Q: Paul has worked with us at the Association.

FURGAL: Yes, he's a good guy and great to work with. I had breast cancer diagnosed soon after I returned. I was in a good office for that situation because the work I did independent. I sat on review panels, I read grants, I drew up the EAP/PD position on various grants; essentially I was a non-voting member of the panels most of the time. I was able to manage my own schedule during the surgery, chemotherapy and radiation and was able to carry on my job; Paul was very understanding. It would not always been possible in another job and was just accidental that it worked out so well.. But I had so much sick leave built up, that after the first six months of treatment, I never worked another eight hour day. it was either six or seven, depending on what stage of the treatment I was in. So I was very lucky.



Q: Well, that's great. I mean, you know, that you were able to find thyou hit the right fit, you might say, in that.

FURGAL: It was absolutely accidental but it really worked out. I loved it; it was a great job.

Q: Did you get any feel for the exchange program, particularly with China?

FURGAL: It was growing rapidly at that time. I don't know how much control they always had over who they wanted to send over. I suspect things are probably better now; it's probably a little bit less controlled than it might have been at one point.

Q: Well, what have you done since you retired?

FURGAL: Unwind and relax at first. I took the State Department retirement course, the two month version which is wonderful. But I wasn't interested in WAE.

Q: WAE is When Actually Employed. It's a part-time worker for retirees who fill in.

FURGAL: I had been in EAP/PD for three years, I was pushing 65 and I had completed 25 years in the Foreign Service so I said this is the time to go. I was raised to think you should retire when you're 65 and let the younger generation carry on so I went out. I liked working until the day I stopped but I never looked back. I had had a professionally rewarding and personally enjoyable 25 years, carrying out U.S. government goals and contributing to understanding between nations.

Q: Good for you. That's the way to do it. I mean, some people just can't let go.

FURGAL: Well, I had a chance to work WAE; they actually called me a year and a half ago, about a position in a new program where civil service employees are placed in Foreign Service jobs either here or overseas. Whatever gentleman was running it needed an assistant and someone in the retirement office thought of me, I said yes, I'm very flattered but I am just doing my own thing now, little bit of this, little bit of that. I exercise regularly; I take adult education courses through the Arlington Learning in Retirement Institute (ALRI); I have begun taking piano lessons again after a 50 year hiatus and I volunteer for programs at the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, ALRI and some student exchange organizations. My husband and I also like to travel so we keep busy. The DC area is a great place in which to retire; there are so many opportunities. It's wonderful; I love being retired.



Q: Oh yes. Well, Mary Jo, we'll call it quits then.

FURGAL: Okay. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this program.

Q: Great.

End of interview